

award recommended to general practitioners whether they grant drugs to private patients or not. We have had a careful and sympathetic hearing from the Review Body. We have had an assurance from the Minister of Health in his letter to general practitioners that indicates as clearly as can be that he is going to do his best to persuade the Government to accept the Recommendations of the Review Body. Surely it would be unpardonable if any intervention by the B.M.A. on this subject prejudiced (as it surely will) the decisions on our claim for which we have waited so long.

The message of members of the Association to its leaders should be, "We want this concession, but don't imperil other negotiations by doing silly things at the wrong time."—I am, etc.,

London N.W.1.

J. W. WIGG.

Shortage of Doctors

SIR,—The Review Body in its Report dismissed the important subject of recruitment of doctors with one brief paragraph (No. 50)—despite the fact that many of the problems facing the profession to-day can be directly related to the shortage of doctors.

Though the birthrate has increased, and the demands for medical manpower have therefore increased, the output of the medical schools in Great Britain and Eire has substantially fallen since 1948. The average annual output from 1948–52 was 2,558 doctors per year; during the years 1959–63 the annual output had fallen to 2,175—a fall of approximately 15%—and this takes no account of the deliberate cut recommended by the Willink Committee, the main effects of which are unfortunately still to come. Moreover, firstly, the proportion of women graduates has risen considerably during the past 15 years (it is now nearly 25%), and, secondly, the number of medical school places filled by students from overseas has substantially increased. From 2,160 doctors registering in Great Britain following qualification during 1963 barely 1,640 were British-based graduates. Of these approximately 400 were women, and unless the pattern changes a further 400 are likely to emigrate. It would seem, therefore, that the effective supply of doctors for the National Health Service during 1963 may well be less than 1,000—probably half the effective output of 1948. Can this therefore be attributed entirely to a miscalculation of university places?

There is evidence of other factors. The Cambridge University Medical School in recent years has declined by approximately 33%, and some of this decline results from a failure to fill all the vacancies. The academic standards required are undoubtedly high, and the preclinical course is three years. Nevertheless, here is clear evidence of failure of recruitment.

An analysis of the output of the Irish medical schools produces even clearer evidence. For a number of years approximately 100 graduates, English and Irish, from the universities in Eire have come to this country. In 1958 117 came here. Since then the number has steadily fallen to a mere 25 in 1963. Two important deductions may be drawn: (1) from approximately 1950, medicine under the National Health Service has

ceased to attract the Irish; (2) that there has been a progressive decline in the demand for places in the Irish medical schools by home-based students. This fact alone would appear to deny that there is a large excess of unsatisfied applicants for medical-school places. Even, however, if one accepts that there is a substantial unsatisfied element, the question that must arise is whether there would be sufficient suitable applicants if the number of medical-school places were increased to true requirements (4,000 per annum), which I calculated in my previous letter (12 December, p. 1534). I suspect that the answer is no—and the recent news that last year there were 1,500 unfilled university places in science and technology lends support to this view.

The problem of recruitment is complex and it is unfortunate that it was so inadequately considered by the Review Body—along with the grave problem of emigration it is worthy of much closer investigation.—I am, etc.,

Princess Margaret Hospital,
Swindon, Wilts.

H. MORGAN.

The Television Debate

SIR,—How many defeats must we suffer in televised debates with a Minister of Health before we realize that against a professional we must pit a professional? Surely it is now obvious that debate by committee is disastrous? It is not numbers, or democratic representation, or a sample of *average* general practitioners we need, but a single spokesman so outstanding that he is entirely unrepresentative. We need a champion: someone who knows our case through and through; who will stick to the most telling points; who will allow no one to side-track him; and who at all times will express himself clearly, briefly, convincingly.

These are exceptional powers, they cannot be assumed with office. But somewhere in our ranks there must be such an exceptional man. Find him, brief him, and make him our spokesman. At all costs let us have no more of these group *vivas* failed in public.—I am, etc.,

Harrogate, Yorks.

ROBERT SUTHERLAND.

SIR,—I wonder whether we could be spared any more "confrontations" between angry and inarticulate doctors, who cannot put their case clearly, and professional politicians, who can put theirs so much better? I am, of course, referring to the unedifying spectacle on "This Week" last Thursday. It was very reminiscent of the confrontation on television between the railwaymen and Mr. Marples, with the important difference that the railwaymen knew what they wanted and were able to say so.

The point which should have been made is this: The Review Body accepted the doctors' argument that no deductions should be made from the Pool in respect of earnings by general practitioners outside the remuneration for work for the executive councils. That means extra work in hospitals, public health clinics, and so on, should carry extra remuneration. So far so good. But to earmark this money for special expenses is, to say the least, muddled thinking. It would

in fact mean that the bulk of general practitioners would subsidize high expenses of certain practices. It is quite clear that rents and rates as well as prices of property in, say, London, are far above the national average. Therefore, according to the recommendations of the Review Body, these high expenses would be subsidized out of these £5½m. I realize that other expenses would come out of this money too, but surely this is an example of injustice which to my mind cannot be defended.

The question therefore is: How can money which has been *earned* by extra work by general practitioners be used for payment of *expenses*?

These are two quite separate parts of remuneration and should not be muddled.—I am, etc.,

Norwich, Norfolk.

E. LISTER.

Another Point of View

SIR,—For a long time I have disagreed with many of the views expressed in your columns and elsewhere by disgruntled general practitioners. Now that this section of the profession appears to be involved in an outburst of hysterical rage I feel that I must express my calmer personal point of view, and hope that you will publish it.

It is said that we are poorly paid, particularly in comparison with the consultants and members of other professions. The schoolmasters and clergy will scarcely agree. The Review Body considered this argument, and firmly decided that it was not valid.

It is said that patients are unreasonable and that they abuse the Service. This is only true of a small minority. It is true that we are called upon to give serious attention to what appear to us to be trivia. This is because the patients are frightened, and frightened persons will behave unreasonably. They need to be treated with very great patience: this is very difficult for us, but the burden must be accepted. The anxiety of the mother, for instance, whose child has abdominal pain, may lead her to call us out at very inconvenient times. But it is frequently very difficult for us, with our comparatively great experience and knowledge, to be sure that the pain was not due to intussusception or appendicitis. We must not expect the mother to wait very long for the diagnosis to become tragically clear.

We are asked to give many certificates and to complete many forms. We were all taught that the keeping of complete notes of our cases was an important discipline, and none of the secretarial work which we are now required to do is as futile as the old business of sending out quarterly accounts knowing that only a quarter of them would be paid with any punctuality.

Ours is not an easy profession, and it is not lavishly paid, but how many of us would really be happier in any other occupation?

The Times, on Tuesday [9 February], wondered whether we were going to shoot the referee or to leave the field. Surely the right course is clear: to accept the decision of the referee and continue to play, even though the discipline may seem hard.—I am, etc.,

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ANGWIN EDDY.